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ATTRACT BIRDS

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Among the fondest and most memorable moments of childhood are the discoveries of songbirds nesting in the backyard. The distinctive, mud-lined nests of robins and their beautiful blue eggs captivate people of all ages. Likewise, the nesting activities of house wrens, cardinals, chickadees, and other common birds can stimulate a lifelong interest in nature.

As people learn to enjoy the beauty of birdlife around their home, they may wish to improve the "habitat" in their yard so that more birds will visit their property. You can attract birds by placing bird feeders, nest boxes, and bird baths in your yard, and by planting a variety of trees, shrubs, and flowers. These can provide good nesting sites, winter shelter, places to hide from predators, and natural food supplies that are available year-round.

BENEFITS OF LANDSCAPING FOR BIRDS

At least ten benefits can be derived from landscaping to attract birds to your yard.

Increased Wildlife Populations

You can probably double the number of bird species using your property with a good landscaping plan.

Energy Conservation

By carefully arranging your conifer and hardwood trees, you can lower winter heating and summer cooling bills for your house.

Soil Conservation

Certain landscape plants can prevent soil erosion.

Natural Beauty

A good landscaping plan will contribute to a beautiful, natural setting around your home that is pleasing to people as well as birds.

Wildlife Photography

Wildlife photography is a wonderful hobby for people of all ages.

Birdwatching

A fun hobby is to keep a list of all the birds seen in your yard or from your yard. Some people have counted over 190 species of birds in their yard!

Natural Insect Control

Birds such as tree swallows, house wrens, brown thrashers, and orioles eat a variety of insects.

Food Production

Some plants that attract wildlife are also appealing to people. Cherries, chokecherries, strawberries, and crabapples can be shared by people and wildlife.

Property Value

A good landscaping plan can greatly increase the value of your property by adding natural beauty and an abundance of wildlife.

Habitat for Kids

Some of the best wildlife habitats are the best "habitats" for young people to discover the wonders of nature. A backyard habitat can stimulate young people to develop a lifelong interest in wildlife and conservation.

BASICS OF LANDSCAPING FOR BIRDS

Landscaping for birds involves nine basic principles:

Food

Every bird species has its own unique food requirements, and these may change as the bird matures and as the seasons change. Learn the food habits of the birds you wish to attract. Then plant the appropriate trees, shrubs, or flowers that will provide the fruits, berries, grains, seeds, acorns, nuts, or nectar.

Water

You can probably double the number of bird species in your yard by providing a source of water. A frog pond, water garden, or bird bath will get lots of bird use, especially if the water is dripping, splashing, or moving.

Shelter

Birds need places where they can hide from predators and escape from severe weather. Trees (including hollow ones), shrubs, tall grass, and bird houses provide excellent shelter.

Diversity

The best landscaping plan is one that includes a wide variety of plants. This helps attract a greater number of bird species.

Four Seasons

It is necessary to provide birds with food and shelter during all four seasons of the year. Plant trees, shrubs, and flowers that will provide year-round food and shelter.

Arrangement

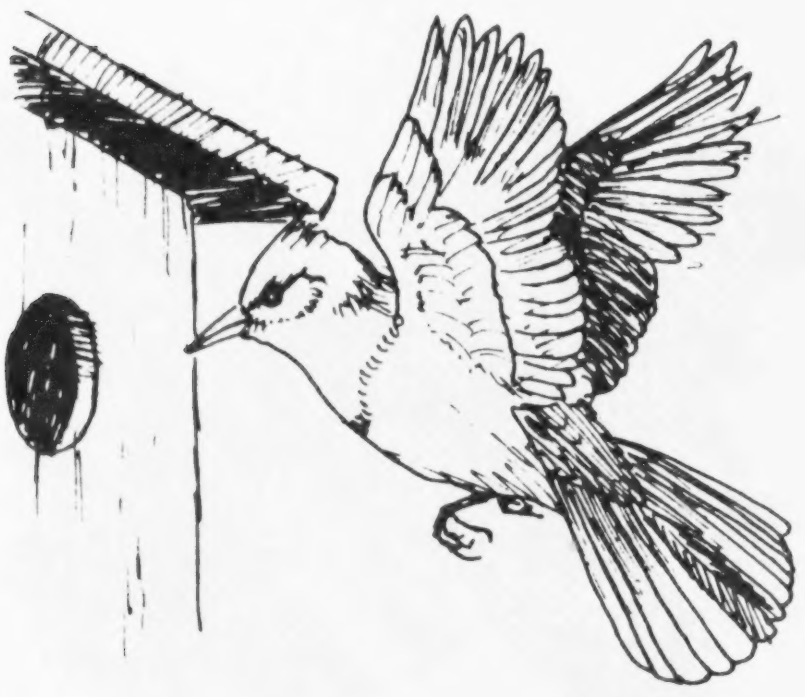
Habitat components need to be properly arranged. Consider the effects of prevailing winds (and snow drifting) so your yard will be protected from harsh winter weather.

Protection

Birds should be protected from unnecessary mortality. When choosing the placement of bird feeders and nest boxes, consider their accessibility to predators.

Picture windows can be death traps for birds. A network of parallel, vertical strings spaced 4 inches apart can be placed on the outside of windows to prevent this problem.

You also should be cautious about the kinds of herbicides and pesticides used in your yard. They should be applied only when necessary and strictly according to label instructions.



Hardiness Zones

When considering plants not native to your area, consult a plant hardiness zone map (they are in most garden catalogues). Make sure the plants you want are rated for the winter hardiness zone classification of your area.

Soils and Topography

Consult with your local garden center, university, or county extension office to have a soil test done for your yard. Plant species are often adapted to certain types of soils. By knowing what type of soil you have, you can identify the types of plants that should grow best in your yard.

PLANTS FOR WILD BIRDS

Seven types of plants are important for bird habitat:

Conifers

Conifers are evergreen trees and shrubs that include pines, spruces, firs, arborvitae, junipers, cedars, and yews. These plants are important as escape cover, winter shelter, and summer nesting sites. Some also provide sap, buds, and seeds.

Grasses and Legumes

Grasses and legumes can provide cover for ground nesting birds—especially if the area is not mowed during the nesting season. Some grasses and legumes provide seeds as well. Native prairie grasses are becoming increasingly popular for landscaping purposes.

Nectar-Producing Plants

Nectar-producing plants are very popular for attracting hummingbirds and orioles. Flowers with tubular red corollas are especially attractive to hummingbirds. Other trees, shrubs, vines and flowers can also provide nectar for hummingbirds.

Summer-Fruiting Plants

This category includes plants that produce fruits or berries from May through August. Among birds that can be attracted in the summer are brown thrashers, catbirds, robins, thrushes, waxwings, woodpeckers, orioles, cardinals, towhees, and grosbeaks. Examples of summer-fruiting plants are various species of cherry, chokecherry, honeysuckle, raspberry, serviceberry, blackberry, blueberry, grape, mulberry, plum, and elderberry.

Fall-Fruiting Plants

This landscape component includes shrubs and vines whose fruits are ripe in the fall. These foods are important both for migratory birds which build up fat reserves prior to migration and as a food source for non-migratory species that need to enter the winter season in good physical condition. Fall-fruiting plants include dogwoods, mountain ash, winterberries, cottoneasters, and buffaloberries.

Winter-Fruiting Plants

Winter-fruiting plants are those whose fruits remain attached to the plants long after they first become ripe in the fall. Many are not palatable until they have frozen and thawed numerous times. Examples are glossy black chokecherry, Siberian and "red splendor" crabapple, snowberry, bittersweet, sumacs, American highbush cranberry, eastern and European wahoo, Virginia creeper, and Chinaberry.

Nut and Acorn Plants

These include oaks, hickories, buckeyes, chestnuts, butternuts, walnuts, and hazels. The meats of broken nuts and acorns are eaten by a variety of birds. These plants also provide good nesting habitat.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Think of this project as "landscaping for birds." Your goal will be to plant an assortment of trees, shrubs, and flowers that will attract birds. If you plan carefully it can be inexpensive and fun for the whole family.

The best way to get started is to follow this checklist:

1. **Set Your Priorities**
   Decide what types of birds you wish to attract, then build your plan around the needs of those species. Talk to friends and neighbors to find out what kinds of birds frequent your area. Attend a local bird club meeting and talk to local birdwatchers about how they have attracted birds to their yards.
2. **Use Native Plants When Possible**
   Check with the botany department of a nearby college or university or with your Natural Heritage Program for lists of trees, shrubs, and wildflowers native to your area. Use this list as a starting point for your landscape plan. These plants are naturally adapted to the climate of your area and are a good long-term investment. Many native plants are beautiful for landscaping purposes and are excellent for birds. If you include non-native plant species in your plan, be sure they are not considered "invasive pests" by plant experts.

3. **Draw a Map of Your Property**
Draw a map of your property to scale using graph paper. Identify buildings, sidewalks, powerlines, buried cables, fences, septic tank fields, trees, shrubs, and patios. Consider how your plan relates to your neighbor's property (will the tree you plant shade out the neighbor's vegetable garden?) Identify and map sunny or shady sites, low or wet sites, sandy sites, and native plants that will be left in place. Also identify special views that you wish to enhance—areas for pets, benches, picnics, storage, playing, sledding, vegetable gardens, and paths.

4. **Get Your Soil Tested**
Get your soil tested by your local garden center, university, or soil conservation service. Find out what kinds of soil you have, and then find out if your soils have nutrient or organic deficiencies that can be corrected by fertilization or addition of compost. The soils you have will help determine the plants which can be included in your landscaping plan.

5. **Review the Seven Plant Habitat Components**
Review the seven plant components that were described previously. Which components are already present? Which ones are missing? Remember that you are trying to provide food and cover through all four seasons. Develop a list of plants that you think will provide the missing habitat components.

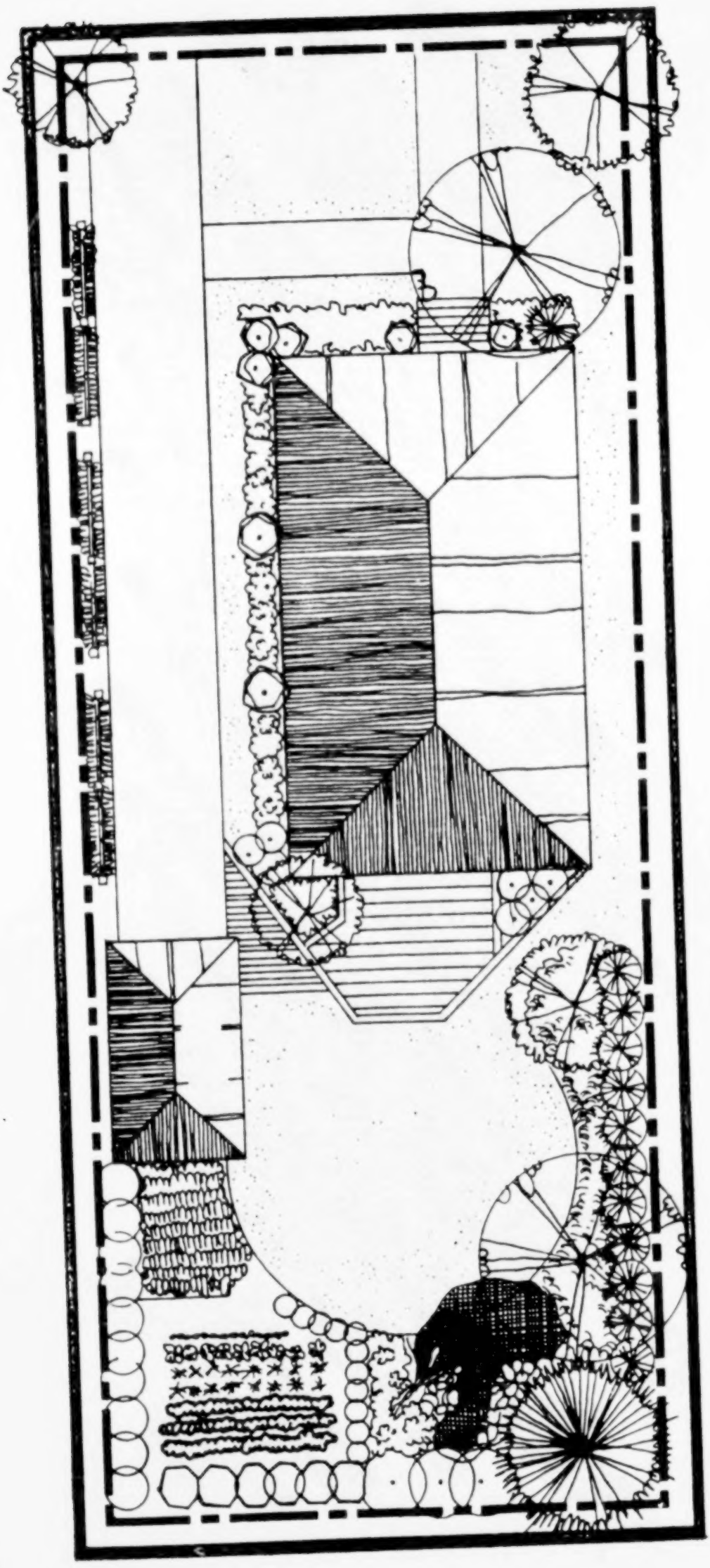
6. Confer With Resource Experts
Review this plant list with landscaping resource experts who can match your ideas with your soil types, soil drainage, and the plants available through state or private nurseries. People at the nearby arboretum may be able to help with your selections. At an arboretum you can also see what many plants look like.

7. Develop Your Planting Plan
Sketch on your map the plants you wish to add. Trees should be drawn to a scale that represents three-fourths of their mature width and shrubs at their full mature width. This will help you calculate how many trees and shrubs you need. There is a tendency to include so many trees that eventually your yard will be mostly shaded. Be sure to leave open sunny sites where where flowers and shrubs can thrive. Decide how much money you can spend and the time span of your project. Don't try to do too much at once. Perhaps you should try a five year development plan.

8. **Implement Your Plan**
   Finally, go to it! Begin your plantings and be sure to include your family so they can all feel they are helping wildlife. Document your plantings on paper and by photographs. Try taking pictures of your yard from the same spots every year to document the growth of your plants.

9. **Maintain Your Plan**
   Keep your new trees, shrubs, and flowers adequately watered, and keep your planting areas weed-free by use of landscaping film and wood chips or shredded bark mulch. This avoids the use of herbicides for weed control. If problems develop with your plants, consult a local nursery or garden center.

10. **And Finally...**
    Most of all, take the time to enjoy the wildlife that will eventually respond to your efforts at landscaping for birds.



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